



# Saddle Mountain Unit

*Fact Sheet • August 2002*



FWS photo: Dave Goeke

**Unit Size**  
32,000 acres

## History and Administration

Since 1943, the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) has held title to the lands that make up this and all other units that became part of the Hanford Reach National Monument in 2000. This area became part of the Saddle Mountain National Wildlife Refuge when it was first established in 1971. Since then the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has been the primary land manager under a use permit with the DOE. The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation's South Columbia Basin Irrigation District also maintains several irrigation canals throughout the area.

## Location

This unit is located in Grant County, north-northwest of the Columbia River and generally south and east of State Highway 24. Prominent features include a portion of the Wahluke Slope, the western end of the White Bluffs, the southwest slopes of the Saddle Mountains, and a portion of the Hanford Reach.

## Habitats

The majority of this unit consists of upland areas with sandy soils, supporting native plant communities of Sandberg's bluegrass, Wyoming big sagebrush and locally abundant bunchgrasses. This unit also contains numerous lakes and wetlands created and sustained by raised water tables associated with an irrigation return canal. Riparian and wetland areas support native willows, common cattail and black cottonwood; there are also components of non-native species such as Russian olive and tamarisk.

## Rare Plants

At least three state threatened species can be found here. Persistent sepal yellow cress occurs along the river shoreline, while upland areas support populations of dwarf evening primrose and white eatonella.

areas free from human disturbance. This is particularly important for species such as ferruginous hawks, which will abandon their nests if disturbed by humans. Stands of mature sagebrush/bunchgrass are important for many species of concern, including sage sparrow, loggerhead shrike and burrowing owls. The northern grasshopper mouse has been found in needle-and-thread plant communities on the Saddle Mountains. Wetlands attract a variety of overwintering birds, including Canada geese, several species of ducks and bald eagles.



FWS photo: William Radke

## Public Uses

Public use is currently limited to approved environmental education and ecological research activities.

## Cultural Resources

Early Native American use of the area is demonstrated primarily by cultural sites associated with fishing stations and gathering camps along the river and adjacent terraces. In the 1890's, the Wahluke river terrace enticed a few settlers who discovered orchards grew well in the fine soil. The Wahluke Ferry, started by these early settlers, encouraged settlement on both sides of the river. The historical town site of Wahluke is located within this unit.

## To Contact the Monument

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FWS photo: Dave Goeke

## Wildlife

Because it has been closed to the public, this unit functions as a sanctuary, providing wildlife with food, cover, resting and nesting/denning